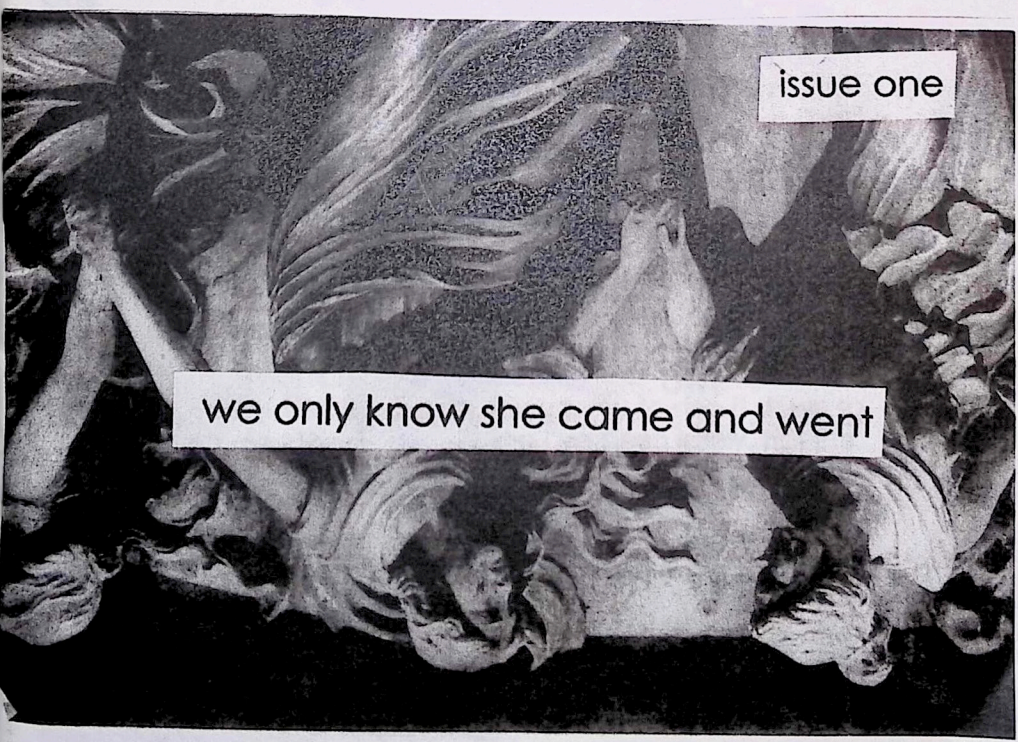
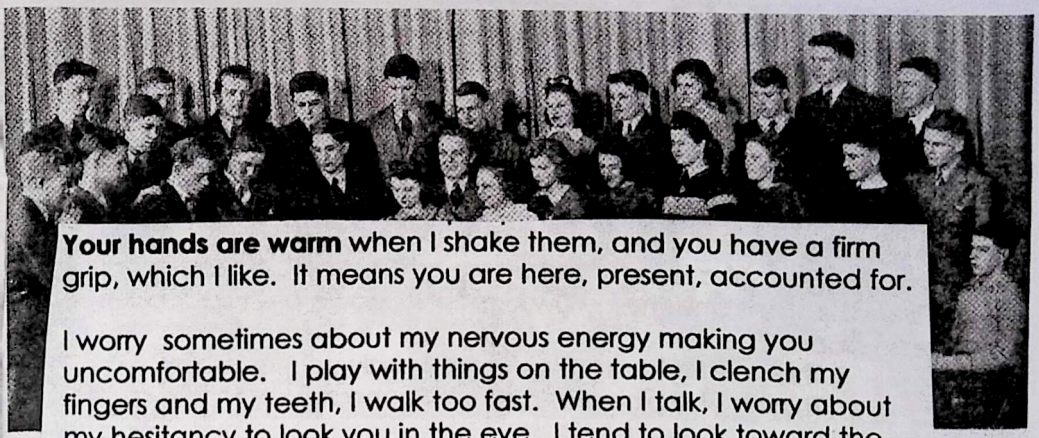
the pine box



This zine might be triggering to you.

This zine makes mention of manic episodes, depression, and the deaths of two loved people.



Your hands are warm when I shake them, and you have a firm grip, which I like. It means you are here, present, accounted for.

I worry sometimes about my nervous energy making you uncomfortable. I play with things on the table, I clench my fingers and my teeth, I walk too fast. When I talk, I worry about my hesitancy to look you in the eye. I tend to look toward the mouth, half because my hearing's not so good anymore and half because I sometimes rely on the movement to show me where to stop and start.

I want to say so many things to you but my nerves get the best of me sometimes. Maybe you haven't been able to tell. I like to joke around, to be sarcastic, to mimic people, to use funny voices and make up songs about what we are doing. I make friends very easily, but I may end up obsessing about being too this or too that for them to *really* like me. Even friends I've had for years. Even family. Even people I've hardly met. It's pathetic that I can be nearly twenty-eight and still, and still, and still.

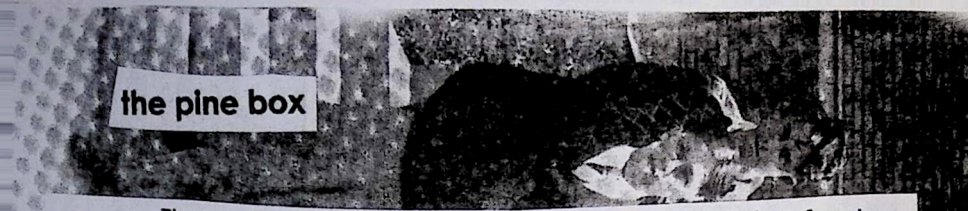
I keep telling myself that it's ridiculous to think those things, these things, think this way. Yet there are times when my brain goes so fast that I can't slow it, and when I let it go it's a chatter or a slow wind, and I'm standing there listening, but I can't hear a thing.

So I'll tell it to you, because telling it to you means telling it to me. To this paper, to these folded secrets, this box.

I used to try so hard to be happy all the time but the truth is a lot of times I'm not, and it's only recently that I've become okay with that. Kind of. So I'm going to try to strip it down so you can see me. The real messy me I've been lately, not the funnygirl me who pushes dandelions in your ears and makes a puppet show to distract you. Not the unicorn meets cotton candy version of me that paints things pink and fuzzy and shimmery. I'll show you the dirt, the mud, the shadow, the fear.

I don't want to make every issue of this zine sad, but this one is, and I hope you still want to meet me.

I still want to meet you.



the pine box

The space in all of us reserved for things to pine for, to keep safe and cherish.

Think of a hope chest where hopes and old dresses and old valentines and the yellow baptismal gown are wrapped in thin paper.

Think of the heart as square fist, ugly yet necessary.

Think of the pining as an unset bone, eager to find a home.

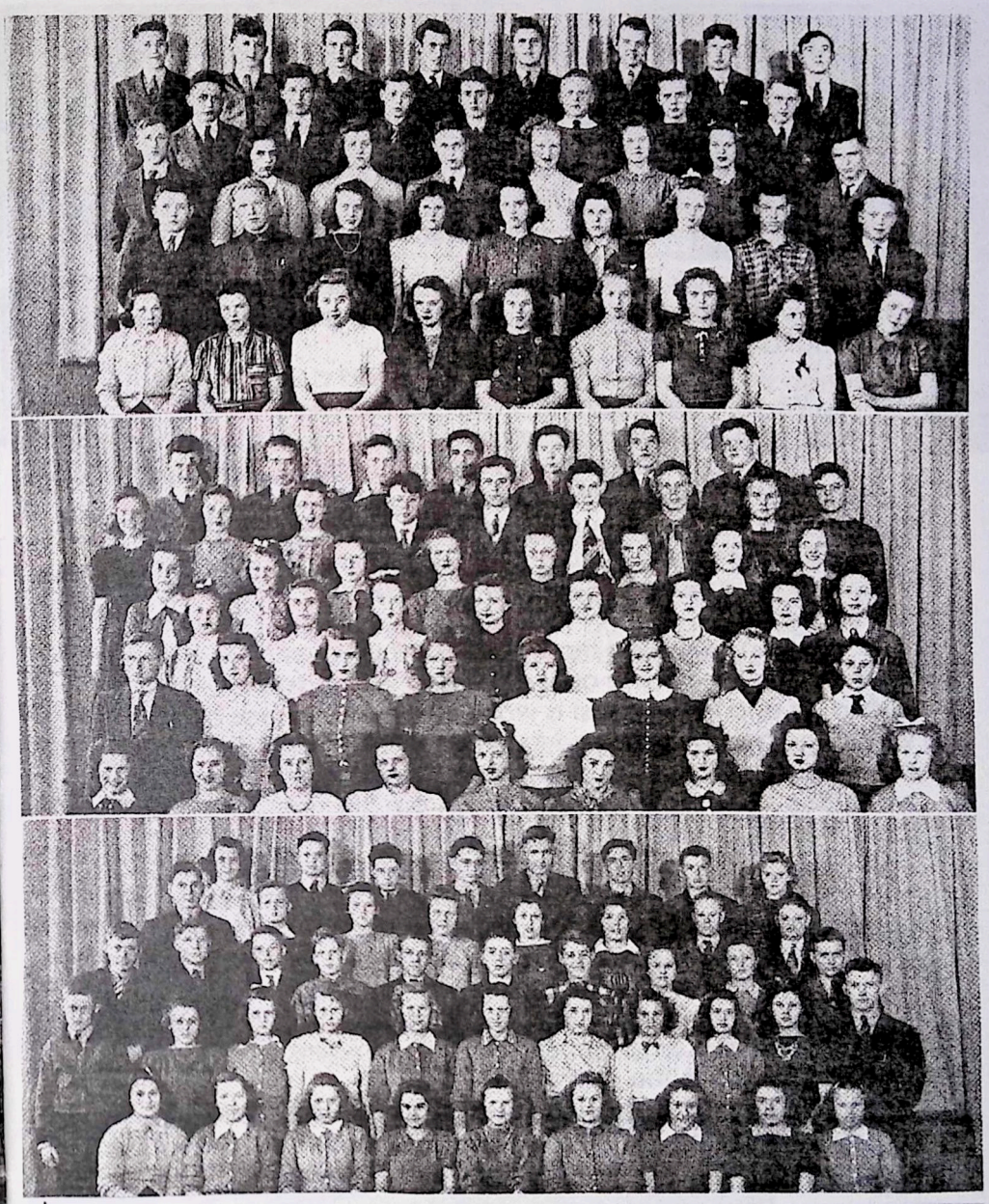
Think of seeing the sea, seeing the terror and beauty and feeling a pull from inside to drown and a pull from inside to swim. Feel that sea pull inside as every cell in you whispers *i know this, i remember this. There's something here I'm made of.*

A longing to return not to who you were but who you are. The deep deep you. The same you that began as a swimmer, as a cell, as something bound to separate. Think of the you that began before you can remember - - at the beginning of time. Imagine you standing upright, amazed. Imagine you started walking. You are bound to separate. You are bound to seek more and then one day you will separate and then again you are dust and then again you a swimmer, a cell, something bound to separate.

A yearning, a wish, a memory of the eternal return and the muddy fullstop.

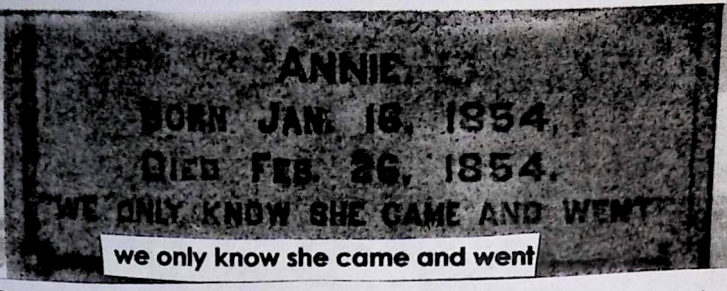
I like being emotional. I like pining. I like imagining lives. I like seeing leaves and feathers and petals on the sidewalk and thinking about what was alive and now isn't. I like old photographs and ephemera found on the street or in an junk shop. I like things that people touched and liked or loved or didn't care about and discarded. That is one of the reasons I can't pass up an inscribed book I find cheap at a secondhand shop. It kills me to read blue pen saying *this reminded me so much of you* or *happy birthday mom* or *your friendship means so much to me.* I don't like to read *I love you* on a clearance table for fifty cents.

Think of your life, over and over, your life. These artifacts, these nothings, these tiny glories at your hands you toss aside. Think of picking them up like a magpie and dropping them in a box to keep them safe. They are your life, over and over, your life.



She prays now to the smallest thing
Under the black brocade of pines,
She prays for the wind muffled in them,
For the fields in the shimmer of butterflies,
For valerian, dianthus, columbine,
She prays to pray, but cannot start.

Jean Garrigue, "Studies For An Actress"



we only know she came and went

Our friends Adam and Becca live in Buffalo, New York. They moved there a year ago after living in Ireland and England for four years.

When we visited them in Ireland we spent lots of time in cemeteries. One was on top of a sunken church on a tiny island. One was built inside of a church that was crumbling around it. One was in a tiny village where my husband Daniel's ancestors are buried, where we tried to follow his aunt's directions to the graves just to be turned around in the rain, trying unsuccessfully to read the engraved names with our fingertips.

When we visited them in England we spent lots of time in cemeteries, including one where all the headstones were pulled up and laid against a wall. A playground was built where the headstones used to be, over the bodies of people no one remembers or visits anymore. Including one in Whitby, where the stones were turned black from the sea, leaning like jagged teeth toward the deep.

When we visited them in Buffalo we went to one large cemetery the day that we left. All the cemetery photos in this zine are from that day.

So we were there, on a bright cheerful Sunday, feeling sad to be leaving, lugging our cameras and grins and footsteps careful in the grass.

There were some of the most beautiful statues I have ever seen, and beautiful names, and fading names, and faded flowers and broken stones, and birch trees all around.

There was the statue that frightened Adam, the copper lady who was oxidizing to the point of no return. Her arm reaches to the sky in a pained way, fingertips grasping. Her arm looked veiny somehow, like you could see the muscles pulled away. I am certain this was not the sculptor's intent. It is how she became, left alone, reaching. She wore a thick cloak, and hornets had built a nest in her, perched beneath her left shoulder, nestled in her collarbone.

There were the graces around a fountain where pennies were thrown, in the shadow of mausoleums with gardens and guardians.

There was an angel on a pillar so high that I couldn't even take a photograph. Only wings against blue sky.

There was a little girl named Annie. Once. Her name was written with a period next to it. Annie. A fact. She lived for 41 days in 1854. Underneath her name and the dates is this:

"WE ONLY KNOW SHE CAME AND WENT"

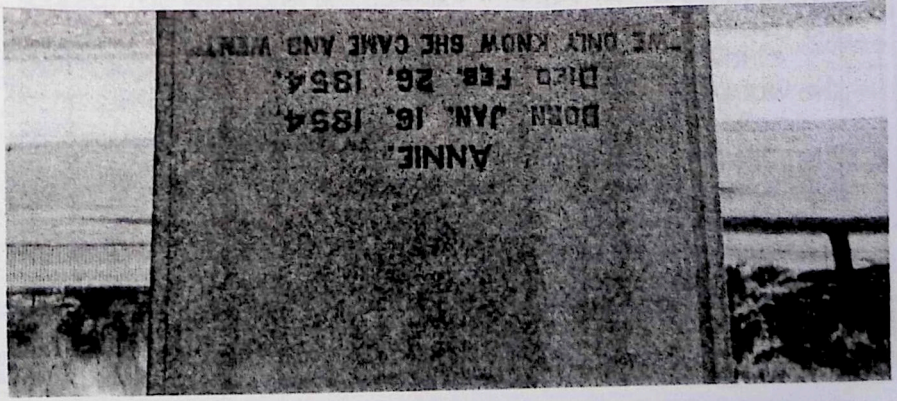
I stood in front of that for a long time, staring. My eyes blurred a little and were clear again. There it was again. Mortality. In the fact. A period after her name but not the fact of coming and going. That sunny day the difference between the two felt clear. Our names end but we come and go and then_____

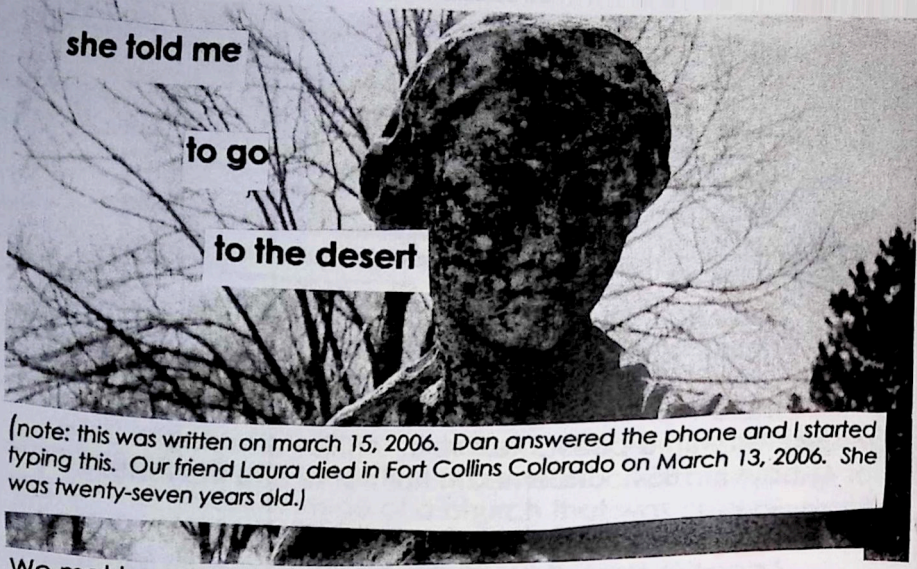
We visit each other and we make these trips to face over and over again our mortality. I don't think any of us want to be buried. Yet country to country, state to state, we make pilgrimages to people we have never met. We sigh at the beauty of their names. We cry sometimes, we grieve.

Why is so easy to grieve people you never met? What is it that makes me feel so calm about that? What makes it so real to me? What makes me suddenly feel okay? Is it because of the distance or in spite of?

We only know she came and went

So simple. She came into the world and she left it, like we all will, and where she went we do not know.





(note: this was written on march 15, 2006. Dan answered the phone and I started typing this. Our friend Laura died in Fort Collins Colorado on March 13, 2006. She was twenty-seven years old.)

We met her at the bar where she works.

Worked.

Just some family steak&ale type place where no one ever went.

We would pull in late at night when we made our trips to Fargo.

No one was ever there. It was her, me, Chad, Dan.
She was Chad's friend.

We talked about Taos, where she had lived.

Before she came back to Fargo.

"I never thought I'd come back to Fargo," she said the first time I met her. But she didn't seem that sad about it. It wasn't permanent. It was a stop. She was thinking about going to school to be a homeopath. On another visit -- our last visit -- she decided she was going to major in math.

She wore silver rings on her fingers.

She said, "All those years I never understood Math, and now it's like this whole world is opening up."

She would get close to me, her hands pressing against the fauxoak between us and her breath would touch me and I would hold my glass tight to keep from kissing her.

Both Dan and I were both completely smitten with her.

She spoke in a dreamy way that wasn't at all hippiedippy but she would stare in my eyes and say things like, "You need to go to the desert. You will love the desert. I can see it transforming you."

Dan just said, "They are donating organs." Period. Fullstop.

We would leave the bar giddy with how much we liked her, how great she was.

I was working my way up to asking her to be my pen pal, since we had such great conversations in this empty bar and even though I lived out of town I thought we could actually be good friends.

Dan just said, "God That Really Sucks. That Really."

Yes it's not my dad dying, my sister or my best friend or my husband or anyone like that.

But it's weird for someone to die that is so young and someone you looked forward to seeing and someone you really really felt could be your Good Friend. It's so reductive to say she was A Bartender. I can't even begin to tell you. Have you ever met someone in passing and felt that **zing** that makes you know –not *think*, **know** – that you are supposed to be friends with someone? It catches you off guard, and as you grow older you feel it get harder to really pursue those zings even when your skin is crawling and vibrating to pursue those zings. You get scared.

Please I'm telling you all. If you feel those zings don't get scared. You will regret it. You will.

Dan is saying into the phone, "Karen especially, she would leave and say, 'I love this woman.' She looked forward to seeing her and we both just felt an immediate connection."

Part of me was in love with her even though I didn't even know her that well. Last time we saw her, I told Dan "I'm going to write a story about being in love with a bartender. Is that dumb?"

She had amazing eye contact.

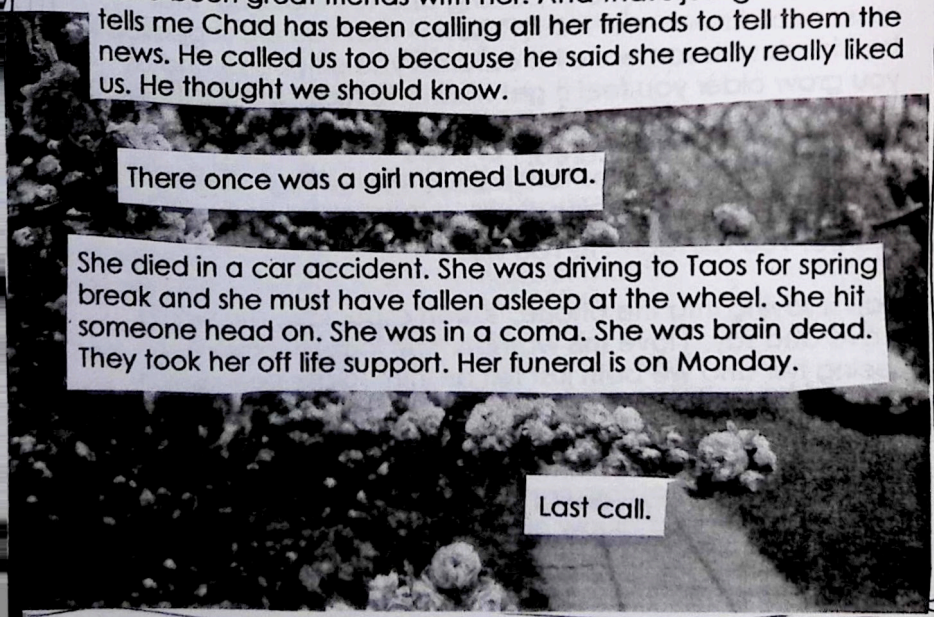
She was smart and gorgeous and would let us stay late. She would go into the kitchen and make us all a pizza-type thing that wasn't really pizza but looked like one, and she would say things like, *How is your novel going?* and *You should go to Taos and teach classes.* When I shrugged it off she would stare at me and smile and say *You could. You should.*

Before we left the last time I told her how much we loved seeing her when we came and all those nights seemed so quiet and weird and who knew that there was this awesome girl in this bar dreaming of the desert? Who knew this girl was there that would make us pizza and who would listen to me and who I would listen to and whose hands I watched when she gesticulated the mysteries of the universe that could half be explained with equations and half be explained with desert hopes? Who knew this girl?

Here is how the story ends.

There once was a girl named Laura. She was in love with the desert and in love with Math. She was teaching herself how to play the banjo.

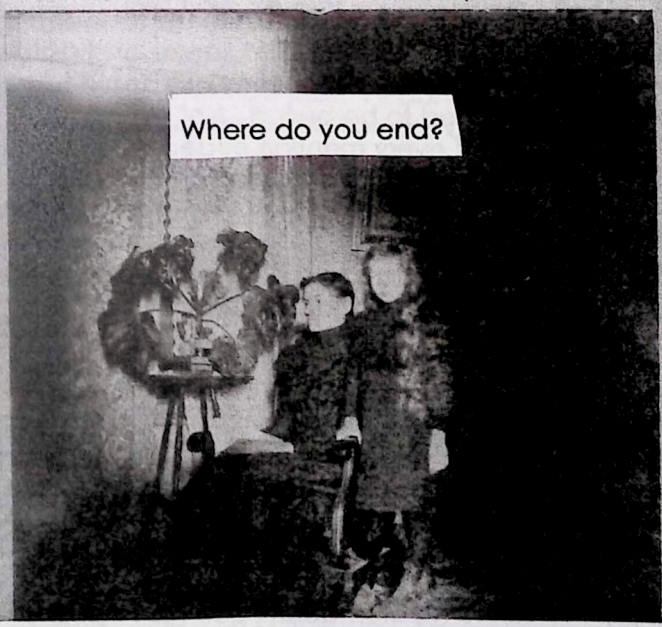
Dan said, "The worst part is that there was such possibility there. There was the great great possibility that we could have been great friends with her. And that's just gone." He tells me Chad has been calling all her friends to tell them the news. He called us too because he said she really really liked us. He thought we should know.



Who are we when we step outside ourselves? Where do we begin and end? I read once that the most important sense we have is touch, because without our skin, without the galaxies of nerves and receptors in our skin, we would have no idea where we stop and the world begins.

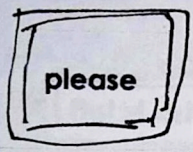
Touch. So neglected in the parlour game-ish questions *would you rather be deaf or blind? would you rather lose smell or taste?*

Yet what happens when someone puts their hand close to your skin? Do you rise to it or shrink?



And who is left underneath? How many girls are there?

Who is left?



take these scars, this amethyst tongue, these marvels of muscle and skin. take these fingers oval and chapped and tired of trinkets. take these bones that creak like tin dominoes thrown down tile stairs. take this bloody square fist of a heart, this pink slippery inch, these needles in my eyes, this haystack brain.

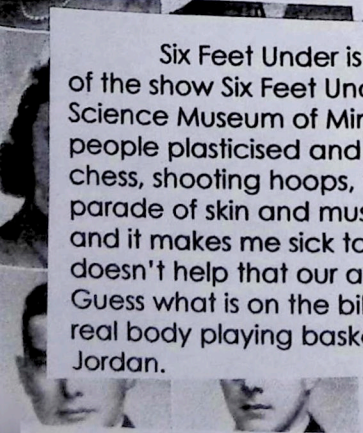
i will take you back. i will take back your thickest words, your thinnest skin translucent as the belly of a baby bird. i will take the crumbling avalanche of your sigh, the terror of your reflexes in june. i will take the softness of your hands, the arches of your feet bare and perfect. i will take the unbelievable leopard freckle wings on your shoulder blades.

someday we will will be no more. someday one of us will quit and leave the other. when we first began, we would tell each other over and over how much we hoped to die together, but the likelihood of that is small as spilled pepper on a wide table. the fact is plain that one will go and one will stay, and I'm not sure which would be harder: to go or stay.

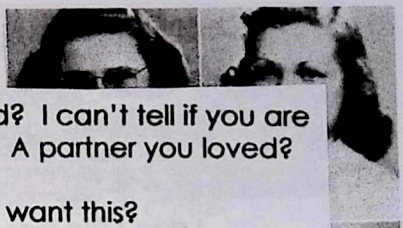
In cemetaries, I look through the camera over and over taking pictures of toppling monuments, of names and statues. I've always loved cemeteries because they are beautiful and quiet, yet I've never wanted to be buried. Not even when I was a kid and that's what every mention of death included.

Burial is like drowning. Being trapped by an element you cannot push back against. It is quiet, dark and absolute. It is unstoppable.

I choose fire. I choose fire and organs playing pretty songs in other rooms, echoing. I choose fire and then there won't be any more noise.



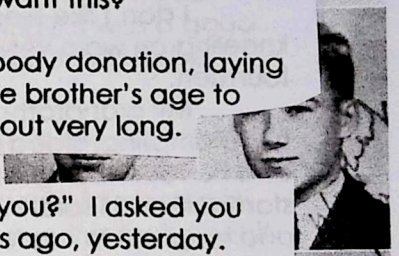
Six Feet Under is what has us thinking this way. The end of the show Six Feet Under combined with an exhibit at the Science Museum of Minnesota showing real bodies of real people plasticised and preserved and doing things like playing chess, shooting hoops, figure skating and doing archery. This parade of skin and muscle and bone and brain put on display and it makes me sick to my stomach. I can't look at it. It doesn't help that our apartment looks out into a billboard. Guess what is on the billboard as I type this. Yes. Plastic yet real body playing basketball, mouth agape like Michael Jordan.



Who were you, being on billboard? I can't tell if you are male or female. Did you have children? A partner you loved? Where did you live?

Who were you? What made you want this?

Sometimes I think about medical body donation, laying still on a table for medical students my little brother's age to cut into. It all seems too weird to think about very long.



"What do you want to happen to you?" I asked you eight years ago, a year ago, a few months ago, yesterday. "What do you want to happen to your body?"

"It doesn't matter," you said. "I'll be dead."

"Yes, but."

You said, "You can do whatever you want. I won't care."

I said, "Other people will care. What happens if you die tomorrow? Your parents will care, your sisters will care. I need to know I'm making the right decision."

Yesterday we sat outside looking at the human body playing basketball on the billboard. Or you looked at the billboard and I looked at you.

You said, "That. Do that. I'll donate my body to that."

No. I said. Just because you like basketball doesn't mean you need to do that.

What do you want to happen to you? I don't know how serious you are. Is that real? Do you want to be exposed and put in a plastic form holding a basketball forever for kids on school trips?

I don't know how serious you are.

Take these things, these fears fragile and intricate as fingerprints. These marks I place on you in the dark, these prints lazy on your back and thighs, these marks on you making you territory and memory.

To think that those genetic images won't last, that even as you turn over in bed they are wiping away. To think that I won't last, that you won't last, that we won't last.

Please I want to stay.

I don't like lilies. Lilies equal death and lilies equal kneeling on worn velvet next to my grandmother's casket at fourteen.

My grandfather (who never talked much to me without her prompting) stood next to me kneeling and next to her lying and he touched her hand, touched her hand folded over her stomach and I said, *What does she feel like?* And he said, simply and resigned to the fact, *She's cold.*

I stared at her hands and felt relieved that she was still wearing the rings I recognized. One was her wedding ring, three thin bands fused together: virgin mother crone. There in the center a chunk of a diamond.

The other was a rose carved intricately in silver.

She's cold.

She died she died she died. Everyone does at some point but this one still haunts me. I don't know if it was because junior high was sucking so bad or if it was because she was so important to me or because my parents were in another state at the time of her death or if it was because she spent some of her last lucid hours with me alone in her room. I was scared of her guttural morphine moans. I wanted her to be normal. To talk normal. To smile and laugh. But she didn't.

I shook when I said her name, thinking she had died. I couldn't hear her breathing. Was she dead? When she opened her eyes I was relieved, then overwhelmed by sweaty confusion as silently I repeated *please don't die please don't die* over and over, as if saying it fast would slow it.

I had a double wish of wanting her to die with everyone there (my uncles ready, my parents somehow being able to get a redeye flight from Colorado to so they can be there, all my siblings and cousins growing up instantaneously to be old enough to remember her) and wanting to have her die with me there alone.

I can't explain it, and it sounds selfish to say, but I loved that time with her because I knew it was the end and that I was going to be a grown up when I left that hospital.

My uncle drove me back to his house to get some sleep. I think the doctor said she would last the night but I might be making that up. We got the house and my uncle was trying to be jovial but the baby-sitter said, "I'm sorry. She died."

We went back to the hospital.

People were around her but I don't remember what people. Her mouth was open and she looked scary and also really really small. I think there was a priest there because we said a prayer and we all stood and looked at her. She didn't look anything like my grandmother.

I think I was standing near her feet but in the corner somehow and I remember people wondering if it was a good think or a bad thing for me to be there but I wanted to be there.

Everyone somehow was deciding to leave the room. I am unsure if this was for my benefit or not. But someone shut out the light and then and only then was I able to approach her in the dark. I was able to approach her in the dark and sit next to her and yes curl up against her and yes touch her hands. In the dark I could not see her open mouth and how small she suddenly seemed. In the dark I could call her these babyish names I called her and I could cry not because she was dead but because of how suddenly she was real and not my grandma--this smiling lady in a pastel sweat suit who thought I was beautiful and special. She was a tiny bird in a bed with her mouth open and she was suddenly alone and gone.

Here I am, nearly 15 years later, smelling lilies. I don't usually keep them in the house, but I got a pot of them from my mother in law for Easter and it is all I can do to contain this. It is in a pot behind me as I type this. It is in a pot wrapped with lavender paper and six white flowers bow their heads in prayer.

When I can open the window it's okay but tonight it is raining and I feel like my grandmother is whispering over my shoulder, remember remember.

She's cold.

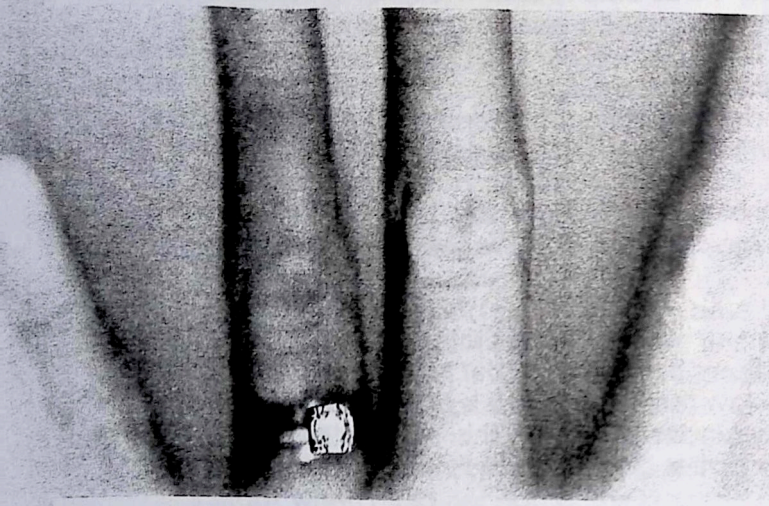
And he patted her hands. I saw her rings. The 3 graces diamond wedding ring and her rose ring. I was grateful that she looked like herself and not the sad small bird I left in that dark room.

I bring all of this up because it is spring and it is raining and a week past Easter and even though I don't believe in much of the Easter season anymore I do believe in Patricia Bader who died alone in a room in October of 1992

I believe in life after death because I am here and her daughter is here and even though she herself is not here anymore, part of her is. Five years ago, on Mother's Day, three months before I got married, my mother gave me her mother's diamond ring and said, "This is for you." You don't have to keep it but I thought you might want the diamond."

She's with me all the time. Sometimes washing dishes, the water gets so hot it makes the platinum around my finger burn. Sometimes sitting in a car or near a window, that sudden glimmer on the ceiling *what is that? where did that come from? where'd it go?* and I look down and there is light there, shooting up. Sometimes walking down the street, my hand raises to shield my eyes, and for a second I see it. The ring I forget I'm wearing most days.

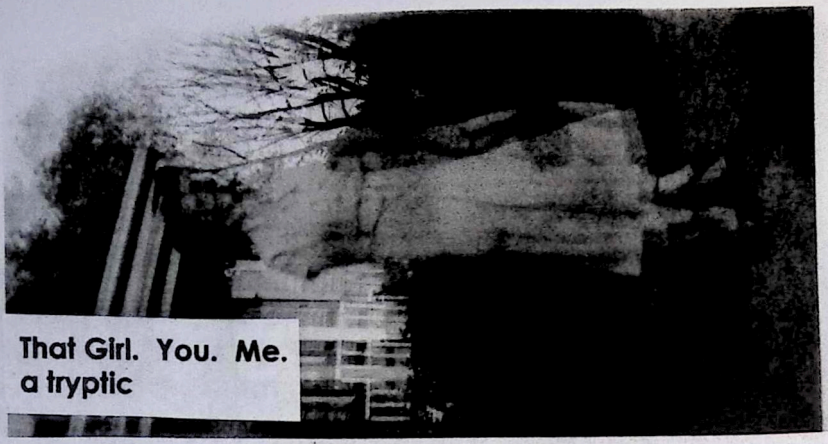
I never take it off. Part because I don't really believe in taking it off for things like showers and dishwashing and lotion application. I know it's dulled. I know it would sparkle more if I cleaned it. But I work in a kitchen and my hands are most days chapped and banged up. It shimmers in comparison.



And I don't want to take it off. I like thinking that maybe there were times when my grandma wanted to take it off and decided not to. I like thinking about her doing things like washing dishes and walking down the street with the same ring on. I like thinking of her seeing a glimmer on the ceiling and saying *what is that? where did that come from? where'd it go?*

Her hands warm, moving, twinkling.

there is a light that never goes out



That Girl. You. Me. a tryptic

When I was in college I was manic. Maybe I was before then, I don't know. I know I would get "worked up" to the point of not making sense or feeling overwhelmed or overcome, but I always thought it was because I was emotional, too sensitive, too much. Before that year, I never felt like I was really losing it.

I felt fantastic. Alive. Invincible. Busy in the best way possible. Things were great, I felt great, everything was awesome. I had tons of friends and tons of admirers. But when I started to slide into the well, everyone disappeared.

Everyone disappeared, wondering who this new person was. Wondering what happened to that girl who slid love notes under doors at 3 am and ran around in the moonlight looking for bats. That girl was fun. That girl sat on the curb in front of her dorm reading Anne Sexton and chain-smoking and would listen to you and then listen to herself and then listen to– *oh wait, I just have to tell you this one thing first.*

That girl would grip your hand at breakfast and stay up all night. That girl would hug you too tight in the stairwell and make you strong tea in her little illegal hotpot. She would open a drawer in her room and pull out a bunch of nonsense things she had collected and make you look at them all spread out on the green bedspread. That girl would tap on your window until you opened it, and then she'd kiss you and when you said it was late she'd flip the lights on and off and say it was an all night disco party. You would love it but be confused by it at the same time but it didn't matter because she was on you, saying nice things about light and matter and antimatter and how weird it was that you were both in these bodies at this time and isn't it funny how much life is spread around? I mean, really, like, how many souls are wandering around and did you believe in ghosts? And you'd kiss and kiss and not much more but kissing was perfect and kissing was plenty because you could kiss her for hours, and you did.

That girl would decorate her whole room with ripped pages of magazines, with postcards and torn out type. It was a blur, it was busy and inescapable, this noise on the walls, this din of Tori Amos and fairies and girls disappearing and political art and pastel and flowers and punk rock and whatever looked good.

It was a type of asphyxiation that grew too tight. It was selflove turned selfhate in a second. It was suffocating and wonderful at the same time. It was complicated, and she liked it that way. It made life *real* and it made life *important*. It made life tragic and exhilarating and it made her come to the come to the come to the god inside of her and inside of you too until you were embarrassed and shaking and confused and warm.

That girl was the girl who would love you one moment and you would love it and it want more of it and you'd say things about seeing a world full and messy and wonderful but you'd come to your senses and she'd cling and cling and cling and then suddenly you wanted her off you. She was a tick too full and bursting on your arm and it made you embarrassed to explain the blood. Like you should have noticed. Like you should have done something about it.

There was a noise in her head, a buzz that sounded like a choir most of the time but then it sounded duller and then it was just a buzz and then it was garbled and that kind of too quiet that makes you want the radio either up higher or off, because the low whispers are too hard to hear.

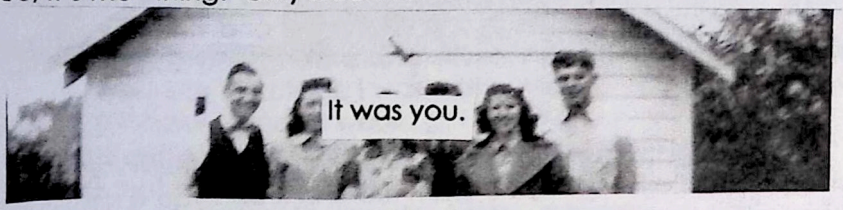
When the sound cut out altogether, there was no one around to hear it. The choir had all gone home, the lovers had all gone home, the parade was over and everyone was too tired to clean up the street.

There was one song that she listened to, barricaded behind a door, insisting that it was the book she was reading that was making her feel this way, that was making her feel differently.

Later that year she made a zine with a list of books she liked. She recommended the book she read when she slid down the rabbit hole, saying only "It made me go insane I swear!" and really even then she saw the irony, the humor. It's called deadpan, black comedy. It's called making the most of what you got. It called playing it off like a joke so people aren't embarrassed. It's called Playing The Cards You Are Dealt but she's never liked card games.

Tarot cards made sense. She would lay them out on the green bedspread alone in her room, thankful her roommate was never home. To see her. See whatever was left. She felt like it wasn't even her anymore, it was some other person living outside of herself. It's easier to think of it that way, because later it will be easier to say, *oh, that wasn't me, I wasn't myself. it was like I was someone else.*

A different way to say it would be that whole "It's not you, it's me" thing. Only backwards. It wasn't me.



Your roommate goes home to the suburbs Thursday night through Monday afternoon and comes back with a full bag of groceries her mom bought that you are supposed to eat because after all the roommate is gone all the time anyway so eat anything you want.

You eat an entire bag of deli sliced smoked swiss one night and even though are sick to your stomach you can't wait for her to come home with more. You hardly eat at all these days, and smoked swiss tastes good.

The roommate hums to herself all the time and is very clean and has only two CDs. One is the Gin Blossoms and one is the Bed of Roses Soundtrack. When she is gone you look in her drawers but there isn't anything there. No collected items of nonsense things. Her part of the room is sparse and free from the noise of all the magazine junk on your walls. There are a few pastel-tinted photographs of kids in oversized clothes kissing with roses which your friend says is a variant of Child Porn and you decide to hate it but really it's just boring.

Suddenly you think everything is boring. You are bored to tears with everything and everything is boring and tiring and you are tired all the time, but when you try to sleep your mind races and then you feeling like the ceiling is falling down. So you listen to your roommate hum or you listen to the hum of the fridge with the smoked swiss in it. Sometimes you feel like you are coming out of your body, like you are sliding off the bed and into the ceiling. Sometimes you feel like you are flickering like an old movie. Sometimes you don't know where your body is, but you're too far away from yourself to touch yourself. To make sure you still are capable of feeling something good. To make sure you still exist.

One night you are talking to an ex-love on the phone, trying to explain the fucking terribly choking situation you are in. You are under the covers, clutching the phone to your chest. You are crying and clenched and a sobbing mess and your roommate --who never says a word to you during the day -- finally says your name and that makes you jump, because you can't remember the last time anyone said your name, and she says it and she says, so exhausted and passively pissed, "Look, _____ , I have to go to class at 7. Can you go in the hall?"

You spend the next three hours sitting in the hall talking on the phone, and when your ex hangs up, you sit in the hall staring at the wall, at everyone's shoes and welcome mats and everything.

Does your roommate hate you? She said your name. Why did she say your name? What is she thinking? Is she asleep? Does she hate you? Will she request a transfer in the morning? How does a transfer work? Would you agree to transfer? Is it too late? You whisper to yourself the words you will say if she questions you. You wonder about your roommate.

Does your ex hate you? I mean, it's obviously over but sometimes without meaning to you end up kissing and end up more than kissing and you can't help if you are both fucked up in the head and addicted to the taste of each others clavicles. You can't help it because you're addicted to drama and you're both addicted to a messy sadness and even though you don't make sense at all you are addicted to climbing each other no matter what.

You were the one who initiated the hang-up (and the breakup-- as unclean a break as it is) with the ex but you keep thinking, What went wrong what went wrong what went wrong what went wrong what went wrong went wrong what went wrong what went wrong.

You go into the bathroom because there are large sheets of yellow paper taped to the walls for people to write on and there is a box of markers taped to the wall so you pick one up and start writing because that's what you used to do.

The first thing you write is I Am A Broken Person. In purple you write it. I Am A Broken Person. You write other things, for most of the night you write things and read things, but ten years later that's the one thing you remember, that shaky feeling, that cool itchy tile beneath bare feet, that exodus you made, that purple on yellow.

You take a month off and when you come back you don't give a fuck. You have no friends. Everyone has scattered because the weight of picking up your pieces and putting you back together is too heavy to bear. You shake it off. You curse the weak shoulders of Them and They and you say Fuck It when you are walking in the thick snow, water seeping into your boots and ice catching your lungs. Fuck it. I'll make new friends. One thing you've been able to make in life are friends.

You don't have any friends but then like magic you make one and you are both bitter in different ways but you are both sick of people. You make a comic with your new friend and try to put your shit back together.

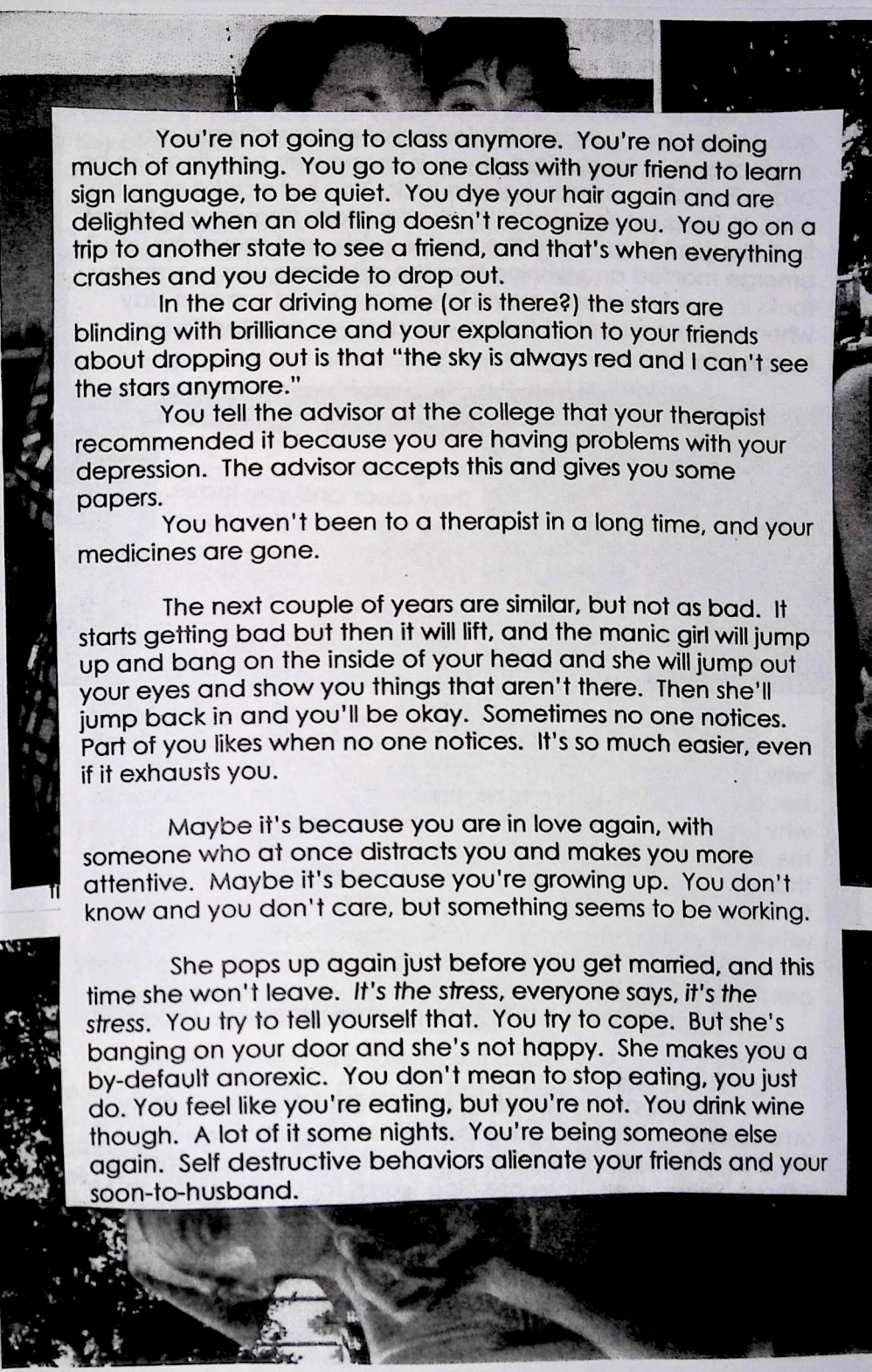
Spring and you are trying to grow, trying to push through the decaying things, break them down into useful things to feed you. You dance and you write and you eat again. You are trying.

Summer. You fall in love. You fall in love love love and you think it could be for real this time. You clutch hands and look at each other, make long lean shadows on the hot summer pavement and even as the leaves begin to wither it is still going. It is going and you are driving and you are singing and you are flying. You go on adventures. You are on roller coasters. You are giddy and alive and your organs bounce as you hit dip after dip but you are still clutching hands until you shoot to the sky. That beautiful one drops your hand to clutch the padded bar too many hands have touched. That beautiful one drops your hand to hold on as you push your hands to the clouds and giggle and scream at the same time.

You fell back into old patterns. Reverting isn't the right word, but it's the only one you can think of.

That Girl again. She's there again, inside you, knocking on your door, tapping and tapping until you open it.

You exist together for awhile, which you didn't think was possible. You turning to stone and turning to dust and her turning the volume up and screaming.



You're not going to class anymore. You're not doing much of anything. You go to one class with your friend to learn sign language, to be quiet. You dye your hair again and are delighted when an old fling doesn't recognize you. You go on a trip to another state to see a friend, and that's when everything crashes and you decide to drop out.

In the car driving home (or is there?) the stars are blinding with brilliance and your explanation to your friends about dropping out is that "the sky is always red and I can't see the stars anymore."

You tell the advisor at the college that your therapist recommended it because you are having problems with your depression. The advisor accepts this and gives you some papers.

You haven't been to a therapist in a long time, and your medicines are gone.

The next couple of years are similar, but not as bad. It starts getting bad but then it will lift, and the manic girl will jump up and bang on the inside of your head and she will jump out your eyes and show you things that aren't there. Then she'll jump back in and you'll be okay. Sometimes no one notices. Part of you likes when no one notices. It's so much easier, even if it exhausts you.

Maybe it's because you are in love again, with someone who at once distracts you and makes you more attentive. Maybe it's because you're growing up. You don't know and you don't care, but something seems to be working.

She pops up again just before you get married, and this time she won't leave. *It's the stress*, everyone says, *it's the stress*. You try to tell yourself that. You try to cope. But she's banging on your door and she's not happy. She makes you a by-default anorexic. You don't mean to stop eating, you just do. You feel like you're eating, but you're not. You drink wine though. A lot of it some nights. You're being someone else again. Self destructive behaviors alienate your friends and your soon-to-husband.

Again, this feeling of needing to compress and shove any good thing down. Again, this feeling of paranoid want, of neglect and jealousy. Part of you is insane with needing it to be okay. Part of you doesn't give a fuck. You just want it all to be over, to be quiet so you can think. You slosh through the filth of it all, the terrible guilt and the terrible pride and somehow you emerge married and wishing that the milestone was marred by rocks in your knees and gravel in your eyes that summer day when everyone wanted to hug you and you wanted to be hugged by no one.

Things clear.
They clear and you leave.
They clear and she leaves.
Things clear.
And when it gets quiet,
I can come back.

It's hard. I don't know why I had to write about it like this. This sort of awkward point-of-view-switching. I don't know why I can't say *I did this, I acted this way I did this*. It's not because I don't want to take responsibility. I don't even know why I want to talk about it at all. The she/you/me stuff confuses me, but I can't think about it any other way. I always saw it that way, even when I was younger and didn't have a name for it. I would make up characters and stories so I could cope with it. That time in college I made pages in my journals dedicated to THE SHADOW GIRL and THE GLITTER GIRL. But they aren't personalities. They aren't people. They are me.

I talk about it like it wasn't me. It was. For better or worse, it was.

My husband is amazing, and I think I can be a pretty amazing wife. We both have problems with this. This weight. We accept that it will happen. I will get "worked up" and he will get "quiet" and those are nice words for the mess it can become. But oh it's getting better, or we're getting better at accepting ourselves and each other. When I need to whisper things about feeling paranoid and like I'm starting to evaporate, he can listen. When he needs to whisper his shadowed things, I can listen.

You can hold the sadness in someone and they can hold the sadness in you. You can agree to hold it when it's too heavy for the other person to hold. That's what love is for, right? That's what love feels like most of the time for me.

Five years, almost. Five years since it got really bad. There was a pretty big bump three years ago, but we held on. We held on, and our grip gets tighter every day.

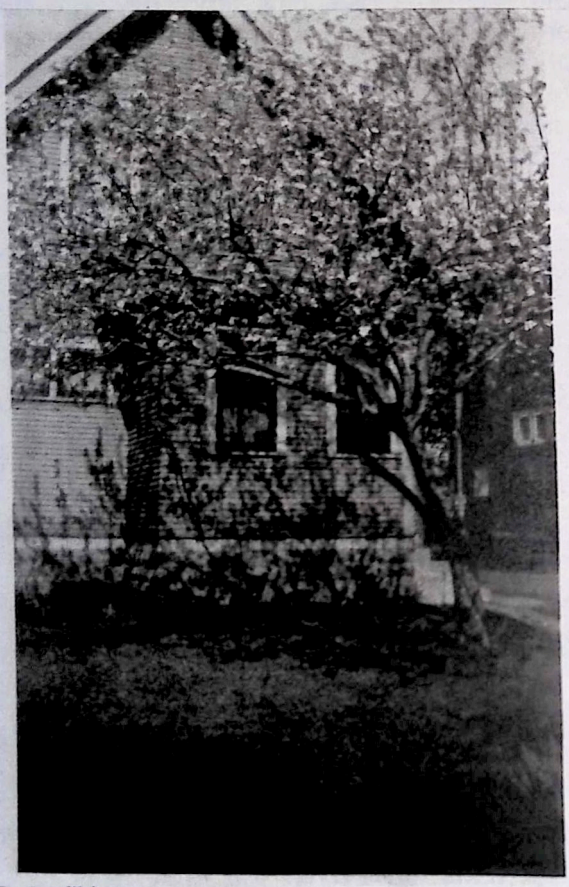
It's not over. Not close. I try. I try really hard. Even when I've been writing and editing this thing, I've been trying, because I'm halfway up to my neck in it but I'm fighting it.

I was fighting it recently at a little gathering of friends. I was trying to talk and have fun but all I was doing was listening to my brain chattering:

"These people are talking shit about you. They think you're stupid. Listen to how you just ramble on like you know what you're talking about. You don't know what you are talking about. They know it. You're stupid. Those people who said you were stupid were right and now these people are stupid and you're crazy and you're crazy and they are talking about you right now. They might not be talking about you now but they're going to. They don't even want to be friends with you. You are fucking kidding yourself you worthless you worthless you stupid."

I breathe in and out and say to myself *this will pass this will pass* and sometimes saying that is enough. Sometimes it's not, but I keep saying it and saying it until I start to believe it.

He says, "You're better now. You used to be way more manic. You wouldn't make sense. You're better. You're okay now. You're okay."



Or I will be.
That's going to have to be enough for now.
This will pass.
This will pass.
This will pass.

Red Geraniums
(more about Daniel)

The morning after completing the preceding pages, I got hurt. Not seriously hurt, but it shook me a bit.

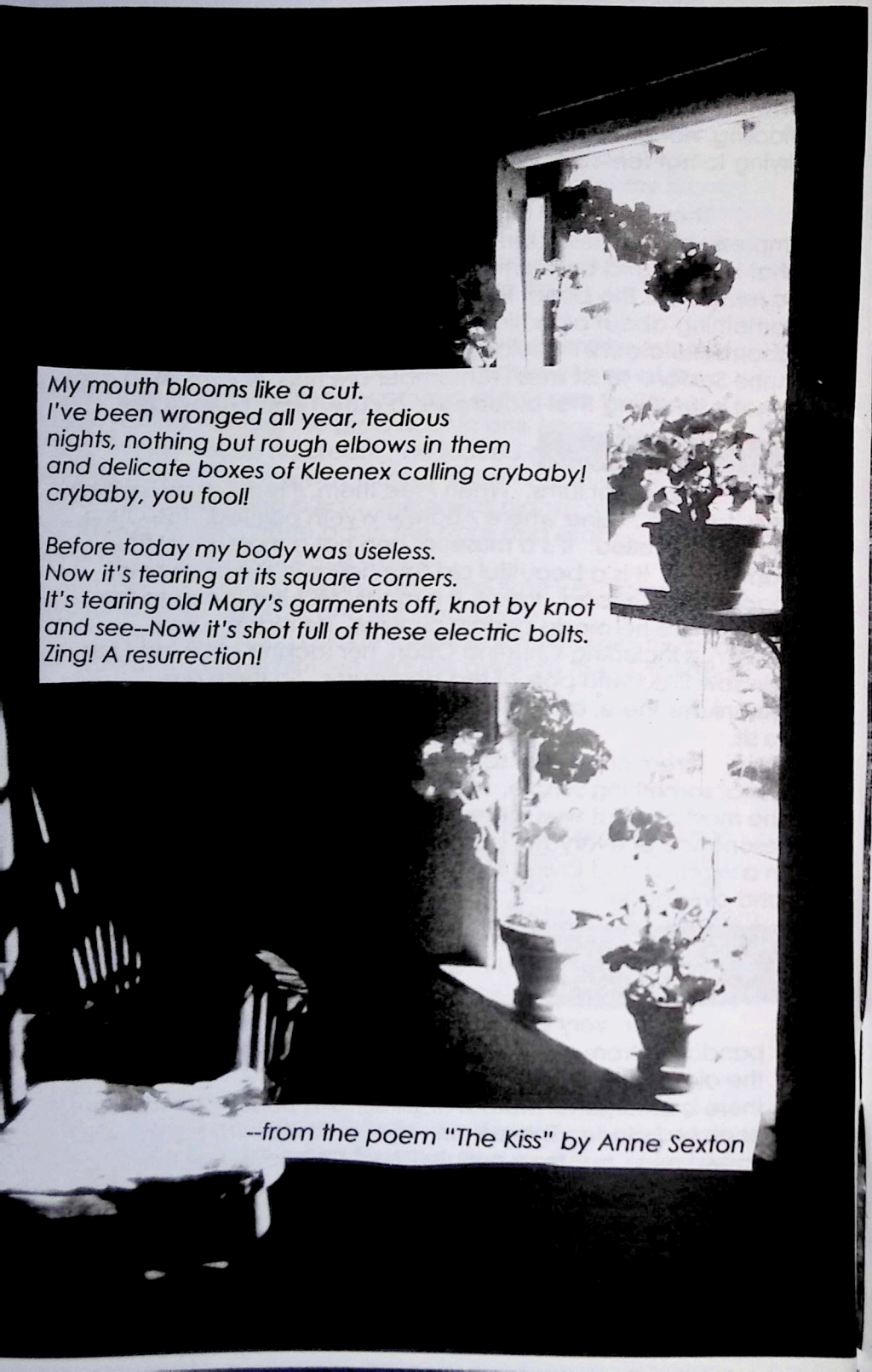
I was at work. I cut my thumb badly on a can of black provencal olives with garlic. My thumb got stuck in the can and the lid pressed against it, trapping it. When I pulled it out I could feel my pulse and needed to sit down, towel grasped in my hand. I'm not very intimidated by cuts unless they are on my fingers or hands. Cuts on my fingers reminds me of being in church when I was little, pressing against my fingers to feel all my bones. Realizing how skeletal I am. It scared me then and it scares me now. The physical reminder of mortality, even in small inane doses, can send me reeling.

My coworkers helped me. I didn't think about needing stitches until one person said to another, "Can you drive her or should I?" *Drive me where?* "I can drive her." *Oh. The hospital. Drive me to the hospital I guess.*

Then I remembered Daniel was home from work. He took a day off to burn vacation time at a job he plans to quit.

"Dan's home," I said. I recited my phone number even though no one asked, even though it is posted on the wall next to the telephone.

I sat by the kitchen door and waited. It was ten a.m. and another shift of people were coming in to work. Everyone in the store has to walk in the back kitchen door to get to the timeclock. It was a parade of people smiling and then going, "Oooh! What happened?" Having to say it over and over. I got cut. I cut myself. I hurt myself. I felt woozy and confused. I kept thinking about the time that I cut my fingers when I was six or so, trying to climb up toward a candy jar filled with wrapped candy I got from my grandma. It was new year's day and the lights were off in the doctor's office when we got there. They gave me stitches and I was so terrified I screamed the whole time.



My mouth blooms like a cut.
I've been wronged all year, tedious
nights, nothing but rough elbows in them
and delicate boxes of Kleenex calling crybaby!
crybaby, you fool!

Before today my body was useless.
Now it's tearing at its square corners.
It's tearing old Mary's garments off, knot by knot
and see--Now it's shot full of these electric bolts.
Zing! A resurrection!

--from the poem "The Kiss" by Anne Sexton

promise

I'm really not a mess. Not all the time. I promise. I don't want to kill myself. I don't want to hurt myself. I want to stay on this planet and in this body as long as I can. I just wanted to write about some things that were on my mind. I fight disclaimers and excuses but I want you to know that I'm going to be okay.

I believe in being emotionally brave and being honest and if those things happen then the universe will catch you and lay you softly down. I know there are people out there fighting a hard battle because everyone is all the time. I thought by exposing my demons someone else would feel like they aren't the only ones lonely in their body and hearts and brains sometimes.

These are my experiences and my thoughts on depression, mania, death, etc. I know other people have different views on the subject. I'm only speaking for myself here. I hope that i I get to a point where I really feel like I'm going to hurt myself I am able to ask for help. I hope the same for you.

Please go outside and look up. Look down. Look behind and i front and around you. There it is, in all its imperfections and glories, in all the wonder and boredom. It's the world. It's your life.

Over and over, your life.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

Walt Whitman